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> I am envious only of glory.
> — Horatio Nelson

1 On December 23, 1805, James Gillray published *The Death of Admiral Lord Nelson — in the Moment of Victory!*. It depicts the English naval hero, mortally wounded during the Battle of Trafalgar, drawing his last breath. This print has not been studied in any depth, perhaps, at least in part, because viewers seem not to have known how to read it. The National Maritime Museum's website describes it as "brilliantly ironic,"[1] but the irony seems to have been lost on most. Writing in 1851, Thomas Wright and R.H. Evans, early editors of Gillray's work, called it a "rather feeble attempt at celebrating the great battle of Trafalgar, fought on the 24th [*sic*] of October, 1805, in which Nelson fell in the moment of Victory."[2] In keeping with her usual deadpan descriptive entries, the caricature scholar Dorothy George described it simply as "An allegorical design combined with a quasi-realistic scene on the deck of the *Victory*,"[3] which may explain why more recent readings have similarly missed the irony. In her book *Women, Nationalism, and the Romantic Stage*, for instance, Betsy Bolton argued that Gillray's print is "ostensibly serious, submitted to the Lord Mayor of London as one possible model for a Nelson memorial."[4] And again, on the website of a Philadelphia printseller advertising the caricature, Gillray's representation is taken seriously:

> In a departure from his usual wit and satire, British caricaturist James Gillray drew this memorial image, commemorating the death of Admiral Lord Nelson on the HMS Victory at the Battle of Trafalgar. As a talented and popular satirist, Gillray built his reputation on his keen interpretations of current events – a skill he employed here to help England mourn a national hero.[5]

2 This lack of clarity as to the caricature's satiric purpose might be explained by what Gillray's contemporary, the politician George Canning, described as a loss in efficacy of some of Gillray's prints due to their being aimed at too many targets. Canning described Gillray as "far too likely to shoot in several directions at once to be a reliable … marksman."[6] This article proposes a reading of Gillray's *Death of Nelson* and of its potentially too many targets, among them, the painter Benjamin West, the printseller

Josiah Boydell, Nelson's mistress Emma Hamilton, history painting, the flurry of commemorative objects produced after Nelson's death, and the idealization of military sacrifice. After a close analysis of the caricature itself and a reflection on Nelson's own pursuit of glory, I will turn to the print's engagement with the trend in contemporary history painting, in particular with Benjamin West's *Death of General Wolfe* and *Death of Nelson*, of depicting the deaths of heroes in battle.

Gillray's Death of Nelson

3 The Battle of Trafalgar, which was fought off the coast of Spain on October 21, 1805, opposed the British Royal Navy, led by Nelson, and the Franco-Spanish fleet, led by Admiral Pierre-Charles Villeneuve. Although the British fleet was inferior in numbers, its victory was decisive, thanks in part to Nelson's unorthodox tactics. The battle destroyed Napoleon's navy, which meant that Britain was now safe from the threat of French invasion. But this victory and sense of security came at great cost: toward the end of the battle, Nelson was hit by a French bullet and died.

4 As soon as the news of the victory at Trafalgar and of Nelson's death reached British shores, a deluge of prints, paintings, bas-reliefs, medals, sculptures, plaques, ribbons, books, poems, plays, songs, odes, coins, medals, cups, plates, and tea sets was produced and sold, and a number of announcements were made for competitions to create various commemorative paintings and monuments. The grateful and grieving nation sought to express its feelings through the purchase and display of these commemorative objects in a kind of collective act of mourning. Writing from Manchester, James Weatherley reported that everyone in the street seemed to be wearing ribbons made of paper or silk to mark the event: "You could scarcely see … a lad without a ribbon round his hat with a verse or something relating to the brave Nelson."[7] It was perhaps difficult, or even impossible, for Gillray to caricature Nelson's death, but he could caricature this reaction – the outpouring of gratitude and grief, the production and purchase of objects to express it, the business opportunities that Nelson's death afforded. Surprisingly, however, he remained silent.

5 One month, almost to the day, after Nelson's death, on November 22, as Nelson's body was making its way from Trafalgar to London,[8] the printseller Josiah Boydell published an advertisement in the *Times*, launching a competition for a painting that would commemorate the death of the great hero:

> A PROPOSAL at once calculated to encourage the Fine Arts in this Country, and celebrate the greatest event that ever adorned its History, the BATTLE of TRAFALGAR and the DEATH of LORD VISCOUNT NELSON. – Messrs. BOYDELL and Co. offer FIVE HUNDRED GUINEAS to any BRITISH ARTIST who shall paint the BEST PICTURE on that subject, from which a PRINT shall be engraved in the first style of excellency, the size of, and in the manner of the Death of General Wolfe, at present their property; and the Original Picture will afterwards be presented to the Admiralty, or some such appropriate public body.[9]

6 One month later, on December 23, Gillray's *Death of Nelson* (fig. 1) was published.

Fig. 1: James Gillray, *The Death of Admiral Lord Nelson – in the Moment of Victory!*, published December 23, 1805, by Hannah Humphrey, BM Satires 10442, hand-colored etching and aquatint, 40.3 × 29.6 cm, London, National Portrait Gallery, NPG D12856.

7 The print shows Nelson dying on the deck of his ship, named Victory, while the battle rages. The central scene is comprised of five figures tightly woven together. Nelson, half sitting, half reclining on a canon, looks skyward as he draws his last breath. He is surrounded by his characteristic attributes: his sword, which droops from his hand, his cocked hat, which has fallen from his head, and his spyglass, which lies atop a piece of paper (possibly a map) entitled "Bay of Trafalgar." Nelson leans against Britannia, who is kneeling on the canon. She has put down her shield and olive branch and holds her trident, but loosely so, as she supports the dying admiral with her right hand under his right arm. The proximity of the trident – symbol of the sea – with Nelson, and the way it almost replaces the right arm he lost in 1797 at the Battle of Santa Cruz in Tenerife, remind us of Britain's naval supremacy and of Nelson's role and previous sacrifice in acquiring this status. Britannia shields her eyes with her left hand in a classic expression of extreme grief, while big tears flow down her cheek. She bears the features of Emma Hamilton (figs. 1 and 2), Nelson's mistress and the mother of his daughter. Emma was known, among other accomplishments, for her *Attitudes*, performances in which she donned classical garb and adopted poses (or attitudes) that brought to mind mythological, religious, and literary figures from classical statuary, grand master works, and paintings found on ancient vases and on the recently excavated walls of Pompeii and Herculaneum.[10] Though Emma's *Attitudes* were much admired, they were also ridiculed by those who felt that she displayed excessive emotions in them: as the connoisseur and man of letters Horace Walpole wrote at the time, "so few antique statues having any expression at all, nor being designed to have it."[11] In *The Death of Nelson*, Gillray mocks the exaggerated expressiveness of Emma's

Attitudes, as well as the torrent of objects produced to commemorate Nelson's death, some of which were excessively melodramatic or cast Britannia in tears. It should be noted that paradoxically, Gillray's print contributed to the visual ecology he was criticizing.

Fig. 2: James Gillray, *Dido, in Despair!*, published February 6, 1801, by Hannah Humphrey, BM Satires 9752, hand-colored etching, 25.3 × 36 cm, London, British Museum, 1868,0808.6927.

8 On Nelson's left side Captain Hardy stanches Nelson's wound. Next to him, a young British tar supports Nelson's left forearm. He is showing the dying admiral the flag marked "VIVE L'EMP FRANÇOIS" that has been captured from the French flagship Bucentaure, proof that the British are victorious, and that is being brought toward them by the fifth figure in this central group, another tar, whose hat has flown off his head as he runs toward them.

9 In the sky, on the left-hand side of the image, an angel has inscribed the word "Immortality" in the clouds with a quill and blows a trumpet of fame, signaling Nelson's accession to immortal fame. The angel's right foot is hidden by the smoke of the battle, while its left and its billowing piece of drapery seem to be pointing toward the ship's flag, a Union Jack inscribed "VICTORY," as if linking the words victory and immortality. Yet, amid the thick smoke of the battle that continues to rage, this declaration of immortality seems "both premature and immodest."[12] Below the angel, three marines aim their muskets at sailors from the French ship Redoutable, whence came the bullet that mortally wounded our hero, while on the right, three more sailors feed a canon.

10 The full title, *The Death of Admiral Lord Nelson – in the Moment of Victory!*, emphasizes the tragic irony and importance of the hero's sacrifice. Below it, the rest of the caption reads: "This Design for the Memorial intended by the City of London to commemorate the Glorious Death of the immortal Nelson, is with every sentiment of respect, humbly submitted to the right hon[ble] the Lord Mayor & the Court of Aldermen." Some viewers

of this caricature have interpreted its caption as indicating that it was a sincere submission for one of the many competitions for monuments and other works to honor Nelson. It is surprising that these viewers have taken Gillray's words so literally, even though there are indications that his print was not to be considered as a serious proposal for a monument: for instance, the proximity of the words "death" and "immortal," or the fact that Gillray did not produce imagery that was outright pro-Nelson – or much of pro-anything, in fact. Of Gillray's one thousand or so prints, Nelson is depicted or referenced in only fifteen of them, and in most of these, he features only in an accessory fashion,[13] or simply as one of the many admirals who are celebrated in the wave of elation at British victories over the French.[14] In *The Hero of the Nile* (fig. 3), Gillray mocks Nelson outright, showing him as a man of small stature, dwarfed by his large robe, hat, and multiple decorations. In the caption area, a burlesqued coat of arms adds to the raillery. As Ronald Paulson has indicated, Gillray "exaggerates the gestures and sentiments with which fools delude themselves."[15] Even the most positive of Gillray's representations of Nelson, *Extirpation of the Plagues of Egypt* (fig. 4), seems to be tongue-in-cheek, as Nelson, knee-deep in water beating down crocodiles with his British oak, appears at once brave and ridiculous. Nor is there any reason to believe that the inscription in *The Death of Nelson* indicates that Gillray is seriously submitting this print as a proposal for a monument. Rather, it should be understood in much the same way as his *Design for the Naval Pillar* (fig. 5), which is described as "a satire on the grandiose and self-interested schemes of rival artists"[16] in response to a competition organized by the Duke of Clarence that invited artists to propose "a naval pillar or monument."

Fig. 3: James Gillray, *The Hero of the Nile*, published December 1, 1798, by Hannah Humphrey, BM Satires 9269, hand-colored etching, 34 × 22 cm, London, British Museum, 1851,0901.951.

Fig. 4: James Gillray, *Extirpation of the Plagues of Egypt*, published October 6, 1798, by Hannah Humphrey, BM Satires 9250, hand-colored etching, 26.8 × 36.3 cm, London, British Museum, 1868,0808.6773.

Fig. 5: James Gillray, *Design for the Naval Pillar*, published February 1, 1800, by Hannah Humphrey, BM Satires 9315, hand-colored etching and aquatint, 54.6 × 30.6 cm, London, British Museum, 1851.0901.1012.

11 By 1805, Gillray had produced half-a-dozen or so prints that attacked the publishing practices of Josiah Boydell and his uncle John Boydell (who died in 1804),[17] and I believe that his *Death of Nelson* was produced in response – at least in part – to Josiah's advertisement. Gillray's criticism of their practices centered around the idea that they seized on every opportunity to line their pockets through the selling of prints, and that they sacrificed good taste and quality at the altar of money. Most notably, Gillray had delivered a scathing attack on the Boydell enterprise in his *Shakespeare Sacrificed; – or – the Offering to Avarice* (1789; fig. 6), in which he denounced the motivation for the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery as greed.[18] In this print, Gillray shows a child holding a burin being kept outside of the circle in which Boydell stands by another child holding a palette and paintbrushes, a reference to the Royal Academy's refusal to accept engravers as members. Gillray shows Boydell as complicit with this even though it is through the work of engravers that they founded their enterprise.

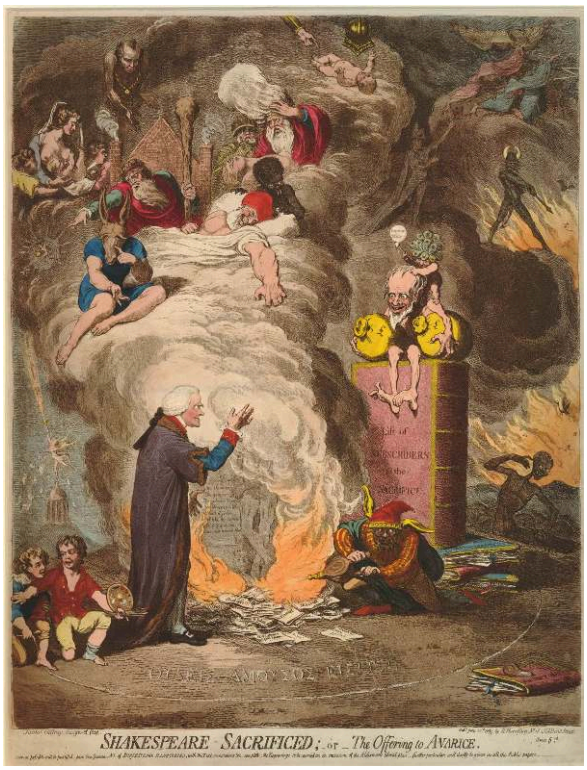

Fig. 6: James Gillray, *Shakespeare Sacrificed; – or – the Offering to Avarice*, published June 20, 1789, by Hannah Humphrey, BM Satires 7584, hand-colored etching and aquatint, 50 × 38.2 cm, London, British Museum, 1868,0808.5869.

12 In his ad, Boydell explicitly referenced Benjamin West's *Death of General Wolfe*[19] as the model to follow. Gillray's *Death of Nelson* both uses and parodies the visual language of West's *Wolfe*, which had become particularly widespread thanks to the multiple reproductive prints of the painting. Gillray knew the painting well, since he had done a direct parody of it in 1795 (fig. 7). In *The Death of Nelson*, we see once again the dying hero lying, in a posture reminiscent of a *pietà*, surrounded by faithful whose reactions mirror our own. In both instances, the scene is set in the middle of the battle, as a sort of quiet oasis of peace in which the tragedy is played out amid the wider carnage. In both, a person runs toward the dying hero to announce the victory, showing the opponent's captured flag. Boydell hoped for a pendant to *The Death of Wolfe*, and that is

what Gillray delivered, although he chose a vertical format for his *Death of Nelson*. But there are also telling differences. Unlike West's *Death of Wolfe*, and despite the vertical format, any hope for the upward movement of the soon-to-be-deceased's soul is halted by the thick clouds of billowing smoke emanating from the battle. The smoke is so dense that it "threaten[s] to choke" the people there.[20] Even the sounds from Fame's trumpet cannot penetrate it, all the more so as they seem headed directly toward the black sail, which in turn looks like it might crash into the central group. The smoke is also made to look like curtains in a theater, as if alerting us to the fact that there is something fake in this scene, also indicated for instance by the theatricality of Britannia's excessive emotion. There is no redemptive message here: the figures are grounded. This is emphasized by the cord that comes down over the central group and by the dark black sail above. There is no way up. Unlike *Wolfe*, there is no divine light here illuminating the scene and giving hope. With his *Death of Nelson*, therefore, Gillray uses the language of contemporary history painting à la West in order to expose it as bankrupt, all the while criticizing the moral bankruptcy of Boydell's (and others') schemes to make money from Nelson's death.[21]

Fig. 7: James Gillray, *The Death of the Great Wolf*, published December 17, 1795, by Hannah Humphrey, BM Satires 8704, hand-colored etching and engraving, 32.6 × 44.4 cm, London, National Portrait Gallery, NPG D12551.

Nelson and Death

13 As the following exchange between Nelson and West attests, Nelson was aware that his death would be highly mediatized; the remarks were recounted by West to the young US tourist George Ticknor who was visiting London in June 1815 and who recorded them in his journal:

> We spent half the forenoon in Mr. West's gallery, where he has arranged all the pictures that he still owns... He told us a singular anecdote of Nelson, while we were looking at the pictures of his death. Just before he went to sea for the last time, West sat next to him at a large entertainment given to him here, and in the course of the dinner, Nelson expressed to Sir William Hamilton his regret, that in his youth he had not acquired some taste for art and some power of discrimination. "But," said he, turning to West, "there is one picture whose power I do feel. I never pass a paint-shop where your *Death of Wolfe* is in the window without being stopped by it." West, of course, made his acknowledgments, and Nelson went on to ask why he had painted no more like it. "Because, my lord, there are no more subjects." "D—n it," said the sailor, "I did n't [*sic*] think of that," and asked him to take a glass of champagne. "But, my lord, I fear your intrepidity will yet furnish me such another scene; and, if it should, I shall certainly avail myself of it." "Will you?" said Nelson, pouring out bumpers, and touching his glass violently against West's,—"will you, Mr. West? then I hope that I shall die in the next battle." He sailed a few days after, and the result was on the canvas before us.[22]

14 Whether this *bon mot* is an extreme form of gallantry or an example of what Charles Baudelaire, writing in reference to the satirical prints of William Hogarth, called "the comic in death,"[23] it does show that Nelson expected his death to be rendered and consumed visually. Having witnessed the multiplication and continued display of prints of West's *Death of Wolfe* – as well as the creation of commemorative monuments to other fallen heroes since Wolfe – Nelson could not but be aware that his own death would be similarly mediatized. And whereas Gillray disparaged the phenomenon, this anecdote would suggest that Nelson was rather unperturbed by it and, in fact, that he welcomed it, as his death in battle (hopefully a victorious one) and the continued mediatization of it would seal his glory. The exchange with West therefore almost appears as a sort of laying of parameters, a commission – agreed upon by clinking glasses – for the glorifying representation of an event (Nelson's death) that had not yet taken place.[24]

15 Nelson's pursuit of glory has been well documented. He was born into a family of clergymen and was raised in moderate prosperity. He joined the navy at the age of thirteen and, from there, quickly rose through the naval ranks. His contributions to the war effort against the French during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars earned him many decorations and titles. At his death, his coffin was inscribed,

> The Most Noble Lord HORATIO NELSON, Viscount and Baron Nelson of the Nile, and of Burnham Thorpe, in the County of Norfolk, Baron Nelson of the Nile and of Hilborough in the said County. Knight of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath; Vice-Admiral of the White Squadron of the Fleet; Commander-in-Chief of his Majesty's Ships and Vessels in the Mediterranean. Also Duke of Bronté, in Sicily, Knight Grand Cross of the Sicilian Order of St Ferdinand, and of Merit. Member of the Ottoman Order of the Crescent; and Knight Grand Commander of the Order of St Joachim.[25]

16 Nelson cherished his decorations and wore them with great pride.[26] Myth has it that the reason he was singled out and shot while standing on the deck of his ship was that the marksman from the French ship could see his medals and, from them, set him apart as high ranking.[27] In reality, at the time, no one could fire with such precision from so far away but, more importantly, Nelson wore an old battle coat on which were sown pretend cloth medals.[28] The mythology is nevertheless significant in that it shows the importance that Nelson accorded to his decorations, that he would choose wearing them over his own safety. Some of his contemporaries found the display of decorations excessive. After meeting Nelson in 1800, General Sir John Moore commented in his diary, "He is covered with stars, ribbons, and medals, more like the Prince of an Opera

than the Conqueror of the Nile."[29] But, for Nelson, they were the badges of his bravery and the outward signs of the honors that had been bestowed upon him and of the status he had achieved.

17 There are many examples from Nelson's letters and from his contemporaries' writings that indicate that he craved these honors, titles, and decorations and that he was proud that he was receiving them through his own accomplishments and not through hereditary means. Nelson's friend the Vice-Admiral Lord Collingwood reported that Nelson told his brother, "Chains and medals are what no fortune or connections in England can obtain."[30] After the Battle of Camperdown in 1797, Nelson indicated that he wanted to receive the Order of the Bath and not a baronetcy, even though the latter would have been more prestigious. In her book *Britons: Forging a Nation*, the historian Linda Colley reports that this is because, with the Order of the Bath, he would receive "a splendid red ribbon."[31] She continues, "He got it, of course, and invariably wore it, just as he wore every other gong he received from Britain and its allies, including a jewelled clockwork star from the Sultan of Turkey which rotated when it was wound up."[32] This is the side of Nelson that Gillray caricatured in *The Hero of the Nile*, and although it may have embarrassed his more patrician contemporaries, it was only a more extreme manifestation of what they were also doing.[33] Colley writes, "Nelson did what the majority of the men who dominated Great Britain sought to do...: use patriotic display to impress the public and cement their own authority."[34] This display of both patriotism and heroism was central to "forging the nation," and representations of martyrdom such as Wolfe's – and even images such as Gillray's satirical prints – contributed to this construction of the modern nation.

18 This is not to say that Nelson did not also appreciate titles. Before the Battle of the Nile in 1798, he is reported to have said, "Before this time to-morrow I shall have gained a peerage, or Westminster Abbey."[35] In recognition of his victory at the Nile, in which he decimated Bonaparte's fleet, he was awarded the hereditary title "Baron Nelson of the Nile, and of Burnham Thorpe, in the County of Norfolk."[36] For Nelson, the choice had been clear: glory or death.

19 Nelson did not hide his desire for glory, and this desire did not wane with the awards and recognitions. In 1800, he wrote to Emma, "I feel anxious to get up with these ships & shall be unhappy not to take them myself, for first my general happiness is to serve my gracious King and Country, & I am envious only of glory; for if it be a sin to covet glory I am the most offending soul alive."[37] And in 1801, he wrote to his friend and patron, the Admiral John Jervis, Earl of St Vincent, "I feel myself, my dear Lord, as anxious to get a medal, or a step in the Peerage as if I had never got either, – for, 'if it be a sin to covet glory, I am the most offending soul alive'."[38] Here, Nelson is quoting Shakespeare's *Henry V* – "But if it be a sin to covet honour, / I am the most offending soul alive"[39] – but in both cases, he has changed the word "honour" for the word "glory." Whether he has done this consciously or not, it is worth reflecting on the difference between the two words, which admittedly intersect. Honor relates to esteem and recognition, as well as to badges and decorations, honor is bestowed, whereas glory is more external and is defined as being "extended by common consent."[40] By 1800–1801, Nelson had received multiple honors, and it seems that what he wanted to achieve, or be certain of at this point, was glory: a wider, immortal celebrity.

20 Glory should also not be confused with fame, which Nelson had already achieved, but which risked being fleeting. Nelson had witnessed the profusion of adulatory objects in

1798 when he landed in Naples after his victory at the Battle of the Nile, and again in 1800 when he returned to England. Both times he was met not only with parties and celebrations, but also with songs and sonnets written in his honor, and with people wearing and decorating their homes with Nelson (and more generally naval) paraphernalia. As Emma Hamilton described it in 1798, "we are be-Nelsoned all over."[41]

21 Having witnessed how he was celebrated in life, then, Nelson could envision how he would be commemorated in death, and he felt that Benjamin West would have a key role to play in this process. Nelson was aware that his status far surpassed that of Wolfe, who had not achieved much of a military reputation before dying at the Battle of Quebec in 1759.[42] If anything, Wolfe's posthumous image had been forged in great part by his death in battle "at the moment of victory" and by West's painting. This is how Wolfe had become an exemplum for his contemporaries; it is how he ultimately achieved glory. And what Nelson's conversation with West signals is that he believed his own immortal glory would be crystallized following a similar path: his heroic death in battle; a painting executed by West; and the many prints after West's painting being displayed in printshops around the country for decades. This aspiration to glory – through prints no less – is perhaps one of the many targets of Gillray's *Death of Nelson*.

West's Deaths (of Wolfe and Nelson)

22 With his *Death of Wolfe*, West had given new breath to history painting by bringing together the ideals traditionally associated with this genre to the representation of contemporary history.[43] He borrowed from the language of apotheoses and *pietàs* to convey a modern moral lesson about the value of sacrifice for the nation, as well as an ideal of modern British masculinity, thus providing an image that showed the country's men fulfilling their duty. It was important that they be represented in modern uniform as this reinforced the notion that those were the ideals that were animating the country at the time. Thus, as Albert Boime has noted, imperialism was disguised as sacrifice, "away from political reality to a train of inspiring classical associations."[44]

23 By 1805, when Nelson died, West's *Death of Wolfe* had become what the English literature scholar Christopher Phillips describes as "a kind of brand-name celebration of heroism" that the public recognized because "they had grown up with prints of *Wolfe* hanging in their homes."[45] Its continued popularity can also be explained by the fact that Britain was engaged in protracted wars against France during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era. It was through these conflicts that modern Europe was being shaped and that England was defining itself as a modern nation, one constructed around the notion of self-sacrifice. Paintings such as *The Death of Wolfe* showed ideals of virility and nationhood becoming actualized or reaching their apogee at the moment of death. Nelson's death occurred just as Napoleonic France had the upper hand in Europe: the Battle of Austerlitz, fought on December 2, 1805, had been a resounding victory for Napoleon. In this context, the representation of Britain's greatest hero's highest sacrifice was an opportunity to galvanize the nation and to provide the ultimate exemplum. Boydell found the model for his project in West's *Death of Wolfe* since this painting had established its maker as an authority on representing glorious death. And Boydell was not alone in thinking of West: before the winner of the Boydell competition was announced, the printmaker James Heath had offered West a deal

whereby Heath would pay him 200 guineas to engrave his painting, which would be West's to keep; the two would split the profits equally from the prints sold.

24 For West, the death of Nelson became an opportunity to regain some of his own past glory. His *Death of Wolfe* had made him extremely successful; following this recognition, he had been named historical painter to the court, then became president of the Royal Academy in 1792, after the death of the Academy's first president, Sir Joshua Reynolds. But by the early 1800s, West had lost much of his authority, as artists such as J.M.W. Turner and Henry Fuseli began to challenge West's style as well as the primacy of history painting. West, who supported the US Revolution, was also seen as politically suspect (despite providing England with a model for celebrating its heroes). He was forced to resign as president of the Royal Academy in 1805. Nelson's death provided an opportunity for West not only to fulfill his promise to the dead hero, but also to reignite his own glory.

25 West's *Death of Nelson*[46] is constructed along the same lines as his *Death of Wolfe*. A general description of either painting would go as follows: the dying hero is represented in the center of the painting, in a semi-reclining position, supported by faithful officers. He seems illuminated by a divine light. He looks skyward, his face pale, ready to draw his last breath; but before dying, he is told of the victory of the British. Although the chaos of battle is intimated by the clouds of smoke and by the fighting in the background, there seems to be a kind of oasis of peace around the dying man. With his *Death of Nelson*, West has truly delivered a pendant to his *Death of Wolfe*. And although the *Nelson* is more congested than the *Wolfe*, its left-hand corner provides an open space so as to communicate to the viewer the suggestion of an upward movement of Nelson's soul. This is less evident in the *Nelson* than with the *Wolfe*, where the sky opens to welcome the soul of the deceased. But the opening in the *Nelson* is nonetheless emphasized by the diagonal formed by the captured tricolor at the bottom right, Nelson's white trousers, and a wisp of white cloud – a diagonal that is reinforced by the tar's white shirt on the right, Hardy's white trousers, and the officers' red vests.

26 The painting was an instant success. A London newspaper report stated, "The picture is truly epic, for it combines a perfect history of the battle with such a burst of passion as to arouse every generous emotion of the soul."[47] Despite describing the painting as an accurate representation of the battle, the same article admitted a few lines later, "He [West] has departed so far from the reality as to make his last scene on the quarter deck, instead of the cock-pit, because he could not otherways [*sic*] have combined the other great features of the action."[48] As has been copiously documented, West had made a similar departure in his *Wolfe*,[49] in which he showed the general dying in a clearing surrounded by officers, whereas he had died behind a bush with only one other person by his side. As the newspaper article indicates, such departures were expected. And West even explained why he did so in a conversation recorded by the academician Joseph Farington:

> [West was convinced] that there was no other way of representing the death of a Hero but by an *Epic* representation of it. – It must exhibit the event in a way to excite awe, & veneration & that which may be required to give superior interest to the representation must be introduced, all that can shew the importance of the Hero. – Wolfe must not die like a common Soldier under a Bush; neither should Nelson be represented dying in the gloomy hold of a Ship, like a sick man in a Prison Hole. – To move the mind there should be a spectacle presented to raise & warn the mind, & all shd. be proportioned to the highest idea conceived of the Hero. No Boy, sd. West, wd. be animated by a representation of Nelson dying like an

> ordinary man, His feelings must be roused & His mind inflamed by a scene great & extraordinary. A mere matter of fact will never produce this effect.[50]

27 According to West and his admirers, a heroic death needed an epic setting, reality be damned.

28 Instead of sending it to the Royal Academy exhibition, West exhibited his *Death of Nelson* in his studio, alongside a copy of his *Death of Wolfe*. It was the only year in which he did not exhibit at the Royal Academy. West reported that thirty thousand people visited his studio to see the painting, and that the royal family requested a private viewing.[51] Thanks in large part to the success of this painting, West was reinstated as president of the Royal Academy in 1806.

29 But despite all its success, this is not the painting that Josiah Boydell selected as the winner of the competition. Instead, he chose Arthur William Devis's *The Death of Nelson, 21 October 1805*.[52] In 1805, when the competition was launched, Devis was in debtor's prison. He asked and obtained a release in order to go to Portsmouth to meet the ship that was transporting Nelson's body, so as to conduct interviews with the survivors of the battle and draw their portraits. Devis's version of Nelson's death is closer to how it happened, for it shows Nelson dying in the cockpit rather than on deck. His painting also exhibits an aesthetic that is closer to the emerging Romantic sensibility. When West saw Devis's painting, he recognized its strengths but criticized it for failing to provide an inspiring model for young men to follow, and it is perhaps surprising that Boydell would choose this painting, even though it is so far from West's *Death of Wolfe*, which Boydell had specified he wanted this painting to imitate. But between the announcement of the competition and the selection of the winner, Gillray had produced his own *Death of Nelson*, which had showed the bankruptcy and predictability of West's model. In his print, Gillray had anticipated that West would choose to represent Nelson's death as "epic" rather than "gloomy." And the result was that West ended up producing something closer to Gillray's print. As James Davey and Richard Johns note in *Broadsides: Caricatures and the Navy, 1756–1815*, "West's image of Nelson bears similarity … to the composition and personnel of Gillray's earlier caricature."[53] Perhaps what Boydell found in Devis's painting was an uncontaminated depiction of heroic death. Even though West's painting was tremendously successful, and even though Nelson's status was higher than Wolfe's, the painting – and Devis's too for that matter – did not acquire the status of his *Death of Wolfe* and is largely forgotten today. Gillray was right in thinking that this kind of history painting was out of breath.

30 One last point about Gillray's print. Boydell had called for the creation of an oil painting after which a print would be made. Gillray's *Death of Nelson* showed that it was possible to bypass this process, to short-circuit it, and to go straight to print – perhaps in an affirmation of the role of prints in the new Europe that they were helping to construct. As had been witnessed with the *Death of Wolfe*, it is the prints that remained more visible, that hung in people's homes, that circulated for decades, as if the works on paper, which were supposedly more ephemeral, had in fact acquired greater durability than paintings on canvas. What Gillray did with his *Death of Nelson* was to insist on the place of printmakers inside the circle from which Boydell and the Royal Academy had kept them excluded and affirm the glory of print in the modern era.

NOTES

1. See Royal Museums Greenwich website, [online] URL: https://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/128001.html.
2. Thomas Wright and R.H. Evans, *Historical and Descriptive Account of the Caricatures of James Gillray*, London, Henry G. Bohn, 1851, p. 254.
3. Dorothy George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum* (henceforth BM Satires), 10442.
4. Betsy Bolton, *Women, Nationalism, and the Romantic Stage: Theatre and Politics in Britain, 1780–1800*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 103.
5. "Gillray Death of Nelson," The Philadelphia Print Shop West, [online] URL: pps-west.com/product/gillray-nelson.
6. George Canning, quoted in Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution, 1789–1820*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1983, p. 185.
7. James Weatherley, quoted in James Davey, *In Nelson's Wake: The Navy and the Napoleonic Wars*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 2016, p. 105.
8. The funeral took place in London on January 9, 1806.
9. *The Times*, November 22, 1805, and December 5, 1805. Quoted in Mary Catherine Lee Wood Kirchhoff, "Benjamin West's Nelson Memorial: Neoclassical Sculpture and the Atlantic World circa 1812," PhD dissertation, University of Delaware, 2015, p. 40–41.
10. For more on Emma Hamilton's *Attitudes* and on her relationship with Nelson, see Ersy Contogouris, *Emma Hamilton and Late Eighteenth-Century European Art: Agency, Performance, and Representation*, London, Routledge, 2018.
11. Horace Walpole, letter to Mary Berry, August 17, 1791, in W.S. Lewis and A. Dayle Wallace (eds.), *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol. 11, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1944, p. 338.
12. See National Portrait Gallery website, [online] URL: www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw62724.
13. See for instance *Fighting for the Dunghill* (1798; BM Satires 9268), *Heliogabulus* (1798; BM Satires 9569), *Nelson's Victory – or Good News Operating Upon Loyal Feelings* (1798; BM Satires 9219), *Buonaparte, Hearing of Nelson's Victory, Swears by his Sword to Extirpate the English from off the Earth* (1798; BM Satires 9278), *Dido, in Despair* (1801; BM Satires 9752), *A Cognocenti, Contemplating ye Beauties of ye Antique* (1801; BM Satires 9753), and *L'Assemblée nationale* (1804; BM Satires 10253).
14. See for instance *John Bull Taking a Luncheon* (1798; BM Satires 9257), *Allied Powers Unbooting Egalité* (1799; BM Satires 9412), *Design for the Naval Pillar* (1800; BM Satires 9513), and *Death of the Corsican Fox* (1803; BM Satires 10039).
15. Paulson 1983, cited n. 6, p. 210.
16. See "Curator's comments" on *Design for the Naval Pillar*, *The British Museum*, [online] URL: www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1480326&partId=1.
17. These include *Shakespeare Sacrificed; – or – the Offering to Avarice* (1789; BM Satires 7584), *The Monster Broke-Loose – or – a Peep into the Shakespeare Gallery* (1791; BM Satires 7976), *Oh That this Too Solid Flesh Should Melt* (1791; BM Satires 8013), *Sin, Death and the Devil* (1792; BM Satires 8105), *Reception of the Diplomatique* (1792; BM Satires 8121), and *Titianus Redivius* (1797; BM Satires 9085).
18. See Richard Godfrey and Mark Hallett, *James Gillray: The Art of Caricature*, London, Tate Publishing, 2001, p. 82.
19. Benjamin West, *The Death of General Wolfe*, 1771, oil on canvas, 152.6 × 214.5 cm, Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada (8007), gift of the 2nd Duke of Westminster to the Canadian War

Memorials, 1918; transfer from the Canadian War Memorials, 1921, [online] URL: www.gallery.ca/collection/artwork/the-death-of-general-wolfe-0.

20. NPG website.

21. A lot of money was involved. Regarding William Woollett's engraving after West's *Death of Wolfe*, Albert Boime writes, "Everyone concerned in the production of the engraving earned a fortune: John Boydell, the print publisher, gained 15,000 pounds, Woollett made nearly 7,000 pounds, and West received a sum in royalties never before equaled." Albert Boime, *Art in an Age of Revolution, 1750–1800*, Chicago/London, The University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 131–132.

22. George Ticknor, *Life, Letters and Journals of George Ticknor*, vol. 1, 11th ed., Boston, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1880, p. 63.

23. Charles Baudelaire, "Some Foreign Caricaturists" (1857), in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, translated by P.E. Charvet, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 233.

24. It is not the first time Nelson imagined how he would be represented in the media. While he was at sea, Emma Hamilton bought a house in the London suburb of Merton (which they would share with her husband). In a letter to Emma, Nelson told her that he envisioned riding down the Yandle, the stream that traversed the estate, in a rowboat: "How I should laugh to see you, my dear friend, rowing in a boat, the beautiful Emma rowing a one-armed Admiral in a boat! it will certainly be caricatured!" Nelson, letter to Emma Hamilton, October 20, 1801, quoted in Thomas Joseph Pettigrew, *Memoirs of the Life of Vice-Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson*, vol. 2, 2nd ed., London, T. & W. Boone, 1849, p. 230.

25. *The Naval Chronicle*, vol. 6, 1806, p. 233. Reissued by Cambridge University Press, 2010. Also in *The Dispatches and Letters of Vice Admiral ... Nelson, with Notes ...*, vol. 7, p. 399.

26. See Andrew Lambert, *Nelson: Britannia's God of War*, London, Faber and Faber, 2004.

27. See for instance Padraic Flanagan, "Lord Nelson's Medals Made him a Target at Trafalgar," *Express*, September 3, 2010, [online] URL: www.express.co.uk/news/uk/197166/Lord-Nelson-s-medals-made-him-a-target-at-Trafalgar, which claims that were it not for "Lord Nelson's love of bling," he may "not have been shot at Trafalgar." The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, among other sources, disputes this popular myth. N.A.M. Rodger, "Nelson, Horatio, Viscount Nelson (1758–1805)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, [online ed., May 2009] DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/19877.

28. The overcoat is now at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich (UNI0024).

29. General Sir John Moore, *The Diary of Sir John Moore*, vol. 1, ed. Major-General Sir J.F. Maurice, London, Edward Arnold, 1904, p. 367.

30. Quoted in Oliver Warner, *The Life and Letters of Vice-Admiral Lord Collingwood*, London, Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 75.

31. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging a Nation, 1707–1837*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1992, p. 183. Craig Peter Barclay notes that the Order also came with a "prominent gold cross" and "a tinsel star." "Heroes of Peace: The Royal Humane Society and the Awards of Medals in Britain, 1774–1914," PhD dissertation, York University, 2009, p. 87.

32. Colley 1992, cited n. 31, p. 183.

33. An interesting parallel seems to emerge between Nelson and Wolfe, who was also from humble origins: the modern nation was being constructed by men who were not of the landed aristocracy and whose upward mobility was a characteristic of modern English society (and also sometimes an occasion for comedy). My thanks to Dominic Hardy for this remark.

34. *Ibid.*

35. This is one of Nelson's most often quoted lines, and can be found, among other places, in Tom Pocock, *Horatio Nelson*, London, Alfred A. Knopf, 1987, p. 20.

36. *The London Gazette*, 15067, October 6, 1798, [p. 931]. Burnham Thorpe is where he was born.

37. Nelson to Emma Hamilton, dated February 18, 1800, in *The Hamilton and Nelson Papers*, ed. Alfred Morrison, vol. 2, [s. l.], Printed for Private Circulation, 1893, letter 456, p. 86.

38. Nelson to John Jervis, 1st Earl of St Vincent, in *Letters and Despatches of Horatio, Viscount Nelson: Duke of Bronte, Vice Admiral of the White Squadron*, ed. John Knox Laughton, London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1886, p. 294.
39. William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act 4, Scene 3, 28–29.
40. Merriam-Webster.
41. London, British Library, Add MSS 34989: Emma Hamilton, letter to Nelson, September 8, 1798, ff. 4–7. Quoted in Kate Williams, *England's Mistress: The Infamous Life of Emma Hamilton*, New York, Ballantine Books, 2006, p. 206.
42. See Dominic Hardy, "Caricature on the Edge of Empire: George Townshend in Quebec," in Todd Porterfield (ed.), *The Efflorescence of Caricature, 1759–1838*, Aldershot/ Burlington, Ashgate, 2010.
43. See, for instance, Edgar Wind's classic article, "The Revolution of History Painting," *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 2, 1938, p. 116–127.
44. Boime 1987, cited n. 21, p. 131.
45. Christopher N. Phillips, *Epic in American Culture: Settlement to Reconstruction*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014, p. 103.
46. Benjamin West, *The Death of Nelson*, 1806, oil on canvas, 182,2 × 247,6 cm, Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery (WAG 3132), [online] URL: www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/collections/lgbt/love-and-relationships/queer-relationships/nelson-and-hardy/item-239327.aspx.
47. Reprinted in *The Port Folio*, Philadelphia, September 26, 1806, p. 186.
48. *Ibid*.
49. See for instance Helmut von Erffa and Allen Stanley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1986, p. 211–213 and National Gallery of Canada website.
50. Joseph Farington, *The Farington Diary*, vol. 4, ed. James Greig, London, Hutchison & Co., 1924, p. 151.
51. Phillips 2014, cited n. 45, p. 103.
52. Arthur William Devis, *The Death of Nelson, 21 October 1805*, 1806, oil on canvas, 195,6 × 261,6 cm, Greenwich, London, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich Hospital Collection (BHC2894), [online] URL: www.rct.uk/collection/405920/the-death-of-nelson.
53. James Davey and Richard Johns, *Broadsides: Caricatures and the Navy, 1756–1815*, London, Seaforth Publishing, 2012, p. 28.

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